



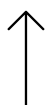
Managerial summary

The final report summarizes the findings of ten LAG case studies that evaluated the benefits of integrated projects implemented on the basis of the LEADER method principles and community-led local development. It explains the cooperation of LAGs with local actors as key partners in the implementation of projects, while describing the added value and benefits that LAGs bring to regions and target groups. The report maps the positive impacts of the activities, also identifies success factors and barriers that the implementation teams encountered during the implementation of the projects. The main findings provide the impetus for further development and support of community-led local development activities. They confirm the role of the LAG as an influential player in the territory, which, thanks to its knowledge of the local territory and the actors in it, can effectively involve partners and create and maintain functioning platforms of cooperation, engage communities and support their residents in challenging life situations.

Added value of LAG projects compared to individual projects



The perceived added value of the LAG projects is the benefit for the territory, thanks to the **overarching nature of the projects**. LAG projects have the potential for greater change in the territory, as LAGs are aware of the context and problems across the region and can link different actors. LAG projects fill in the missing services and activities in the area, which increases **their accessibility** for the necessary target groups. The advantage of these projects is also their effectiveness for the target groups, thanks to the fact that the activities covered the entire territory of the LAG, not just the area of activity of one organisation. The LAG can **work comprehensively with the target group** and connect various topics in projects.



One of the key added values of the LAG is **the ability to identify needs using the bottom-up approach**, i.e. directly from the field and from residents. This made it possible to include smaller municipalities and peripheral areas in the planning, which are otherwise often overlooked within the municipality with extended power (MEP). LAGs ensure **continuous mapping of topics**, respond flexibly to new challenges and promote **strategic and realistic service planning** based on real community needs. The LAG implements the OPE+ project within a comprehensive strategy of territorial development based on a multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach, which brings various **synergy effects** and allows for the efficient use of resources.



LAGs play an important role as **intermediary and coordinator between different sectors**, such as schools, municipalities, non-profit organisations, entrepreneurs and service providers. This has created **new partnerships, improved communication between actors and created a space for knowledge sharing, mentoring and joint problem-solving**. Long-term cooperation has led to the building of trust between the partners and to the strengthening of relations in the territory. Projects implemented directly by the LAG allow the involvement of a larger number of actors who maintain cooperation even after the end of the project, thus supporting the sustainability of the activities. LAG projects also bring **greater support to the partners involved**, who do not have to deal with the administrative side to the same extent as in individual projects. This benefit makes it possible to involve



even those actors who would not have the capacity to implement the project on their own. OPE+ projects focusing on social inclusion, community strengthening, and employment support require a comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach to the target group as well as coordination among local stakeholders; therefore, implementation by the LAG is well-justified.



LAG projects are key to the introduction **of innovative methods and approaches** that would often not be feasible in the area without their support. These innovations include, for example, case management, the creation of new positions within projects, community work methodologies, or the transfer of good practice from international experience.

Main benefits of projects for target groups



Improvement of the living situation and stabilization of target groups

- Improving the ability to deal with difficult life situations
- Individual support from a social worker or multidisciplinary team
- Stabilization after the loss of a relative and provision of crisis assistance
- Decreasing the risk of isolation
- Reducing the impact of social exclusion thanks to food aid or senior taxi



Increase of awareness and orientation in services

- Mediation and connection to available social and health services
- Building trust in services and increasing awareness of them through financial literacy counselling
- Greater confidence in the possibility of helping thanks to well-known actors in the area
- Seminars, training and direct support in households



Development of competencies and independence

- Support for caregivers in the form of education, counselling or psychotherapy
- Acquisition of practical skills and abilities to manage care
- Strengthening financial literacy and debt resolution skills
- Improving understanding of debt resolution support options
- Mobilising and strengthening community capacities through community work
- Activation and development of local leaders, support of community independence



Gaining opportunities to participate in the labour market

- Promoting labour market integration, including job creation
- Comprehensive support and empowerment of the target group



Social integration and strengthening ties in the territory

- Identification of children and families at risk and their connection to sources of assistance



The creation of opportunities to spend leisure time and engage with community

- Creation of community and environmental events supporting the ties to the territory



through accessible assistance, and by fostering cooperation and trust with relevant stakeholders.

- Provision of housing, employment and psychosocial counselling and employment coordination
- Integration into society
- Effective support for small-scale entrepreneurship
- Support provided even after gaining employment or starting business

- Helping families at risk of social exclusion

- Activation of communities, neighborhood help and self-help groups

- Strengthening social and intergenerational ties

- Solving complex problems within working groups and case conferences

- Creating opportunities for meaningful leisure time and activating diverse groups, such as children, seniors, informal carers and the public

- An opportunity to take part in activities that strengthen community relationships and a sense of belonging to the place, thanks to a focus on shared local topics.

Examples of good practice from projects

Use of community work methods

The developmental element of the projects of the Local Action Groups (LAGs) includes, for example, innovative/new involvement of community work methods, such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) or Human-Centered Design (HCD), and the community work methodology of the RoSTEAM organization at the University of Ostrava. These approaches contribute to community development by building on the active involvement of its members and strengthening their capabilities. In many cases, people from the target group are accustomed to a model of social services based on providing assistance. The use of these community work methods effectively supports a change in this mindset—from passive acceptance to active engagement. This helps to further activate target groups and integrate them into broader society. A significant role in the projects is also played by building strong interpersonal relationships through personal and long-term contact.

Support for informal carers

Support for informal caregivers within the projects was perceived by respondents as an innovative element, as the target group of caregivers was a marginalized group prior to the amendment of Act No. 108/2006 Coll. on social services. However, their support is crucial for the long-term functioning of care in a natural environment. Thus, the LAG projects anticipated the accepted changes in legislation and can serve as an example of good practice for activities supporting informal caregivers. The projects enabled the involvement of various professionals and tailored the provided support to the needs of specific individuals (e.g., individual counselling). An important and innovative element was also the support for bereaved individuals who do not formally fall under the target group of caregivers but require support for some time after the loss of a loved one.

Comprehensive support for target groups

Within several projects, comprehensive support for target groups was successfully provided. In one of the evaluated projects, for example, a multidisciplinary team was formed consisting of a social department worker, a work coordinator, a curator, a psychologist, and a community centre worker, which represents a strong tool for effective work with the target group. In another project, an innovative position of a coordinator was created between the school and social services. The coordinator, due to their connection to schools,



can identify at-risk children and, consequently, their families. Often, these are children from the so-called grey zone, where the social and legal protection of children (OSPOD) has not yet intervened, and without this form of effective support, at-risk children and families could otherwise remain beyond the reach of supportive measures and without the necessary information on how to address their situation. The Cochem practice, which is an interdisciplinary approach to resolving family situations, was utilized to support families.

SETTING UP CALL NO. 008 OPZ+

- Call 008 (Support for community-led local development (1)) was generally evaluated very positively by the LAG implementation teams. The broad scope of the challenge and the flexibility that allowed projects to be tailored as much as possible to the needs of the area and target groups, as well as to experiment with new innovative solutions, were appreciated.
 - Communication with the managing authority was evaluated as **helpful and timely**. LAGs appreciate the implementation of professional seminars/workshops and other events aimed at sharing good practices among Local Action Groups (LAGs) and stakeholders in the area, as well as the transfer of information to the municipalities with extended powers (ORP), regions, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MPSV), organized by the Managing Authority and in cooperation with NS MAS. They also consider the international conference "CLLD Thriving Communities – An Opportunity for a Shared Future," organized by the MPSV in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Regional Development, and NS MAS on March 31 - April 1, 2025, to be significantly beneficial.
 - Finally, **simplified reporting methods were also welcome**.
 - × A complication mentioned was the initial non-functionality of the information system (IS ESF), which affected all challenges and recipients in the Operational Program Employment Plus (OPZ+). Recipients had to transfer the collected data into the IS ESF after the system was put into operation, which partially increased the administrative burden for the implementers.
 - × Furthermore, **reporting in connection with monitoring** sheets was perceived as unfortunate. Although LAGs understand that it is necessary to document the required information about the supported people in some way, the scope of the monitoring sheets (including contact details of the target group, education, etc.) was perceived as problematic. The last problematic area mentioned by respondents was the **initially unclear definition of community work and related job positions within the call**, as the method of community work is a relatively new approach for LAGs. This barrier was overcome through individual consultations and strengthening the professional capacities, especially in the form of workshops, training and sharing of good practice.
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- ▶ A key factor for success is **good communication and cooperation between actors in the area**. The first step is to jointly define the needs and priorities based on which the LAG project is created. However, it is equally important to set up cooperation at the beginning of the project implementation, when it is necessary to clearly define the role of the LAG and other involved entities. Although cooperation with local actors is usually already established within the LAG and communication works well, it needs to be further developed and systematically supported, especially in the new support areas.
 - ▶ In projects where a social worker is involved in the activities, turned out beneficial when this role was filled by



someone with prior experience in social work. LAGs have been operating in the field of social work for a relatively short time and do not have the infrastructure for professional support for these workers, such as supervision, as social office workers do. Social workers in LAGs are in a specific position, operate next to the system of social departments of municipalities with extended powers, and address the gaps where there was unmet demand for assistance, especially in small municipalities and remote areas. In the follow-up call, social workers in LAGs will receive methodological support directly from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

- ▶ In the case of supporting informal caregivers, involving organizations that have long worked with individuals with serious illnesses or those in palliative care has proven to be a functional solution. These organizations are well aware of not only the needs of the patients themselves but also those of their relatives and informal caregivers, thus having access to a target group that is otherwise difficult to reach. An example is the involvement of charities that provide palliative care. Thanks to the project, it is also possible to focus on caregivers and the bereaved. In this way, the project helps to fill the gaps in the system where support has been lacking.
- ▶ In the case of community activities, finding suitable spaces for meetings is necessary. Close cooperation with local authorities is important, as relationships with leadership are key to implementing activities or finding appropriate spaces for them, especially in smaller municipalities. A successful community work approach includes identifying common themes within the community, introducing participatory methods of working with the community, and gradually transferring activities to the members of that community. Local leaders play a significant role in this context, as they formulate and further develop these themes.

Recommendations

1 Although the **call was evaluated exceptionally positively**, some individual topics for improvement or adapting best practice were defined within the Evaluation. In the future, it may be appropriate to use other **forms of reporting of** representatives of target groups, or to narrow down the range of information collected in monitoring sheets based on feedback.

2 **The need for functional communication with relevant actors in the territory in social agendas is confirmed.** An example of this is social work, where it is important for the LAG to cooperate especially with the MEP or the Regional Authority in defining the role and cooperation of field workers.

3 For subsequent projects, we recommend that the LAG implementation teams **work with the available community work methodologies already in the context of setting up projects.** Continuous work is important not only with communities, but also with representatives of municipalities and local organizations. In one of the evaluated projects, the creation of local associations proved to be a good practice, because it can ensure the continuity of activities even after the end of the project.



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In the context **of systemic solutions of deficiencies in the social area**, we recommend to further **develop support for case management and multidisciplinary teams**. Coordination of activities and case management can address the unavailability of services and experts in the area, and at the same time can encourage greater interconnection and education of health workers and doctors in the social field.

The final report (hereinafter also the "Report") was prepared as part of the implementation of the public contract "*Case studies of projects for the evaluation of the call Support of community-led local development (1) of the Operational Programme Employment Plus*". A total of 135 projects of local action groups were supported under the call. The aim of the projects is to strengthen active inclusion, equal opportunities, non-discrimination and active participation in community life, to improve employability, especially in the case of disadvantaged groups.

The presented information, findings and follow-up recommendations are based on a search of available sources and in-depth interviews with representatives of the project implementation team, partners and target groups. The evaluation took place from January 2025 to July 2025.